

UNCLASSIFIED

A16

WHA Press Guidance
January 24, 2002

RELEASED IN FULL

VENEZUELA: REACTION TO MARCHES

Questions: Anything new to say about the January 23 marches in Caracas, Venezuela?

**A: THE SIMULTANEOUS OPPOSITION AND PRO-
GOVERNMENT MARCHES IN CARACAS YESTERDAY WERE A
VICTORY FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ESSENTIAL TO THE
HEALTHY FUNCTIONING OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.
WE CONTINUE TO URGE VENEZUELANS TO CONTINUE TO
FOSTER THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THROUGH
CONSTRUCTIVE, PEACEFUL ENGAGEMENT.**

[Background: On January 23 -- the 44th anniversary of the overthrow of Venezuela's last military dictator, Pérez Jiménez -- possibly as many as 200,000 demonstrators participated in pro- and anti-Chávez marches. Press reports on the number of participants in the marches vary widely. The Embassy estimated that the opposition exceeded its goal to mobilize 50,000 supporters by putting up to 150,000 people on the street and Chávez successfully assembled an enthusiastic crowd of about 30,000 people.]

UNCLASSIFIED